

Though cranes and bulldozers have been a familiar sight in Kansas City's urban core for several years now, the latest construction project looming across the horizon marks something truly special: the future site of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

Scheduled to open in time for the fall 2011 season, the center will be housed under two large, half-shell structures fronted by a wall of tempered glass. With a grand style that is already on display during the hardhat tours the facility organizes, the design has a post-minimalist quality reminiscent of the work of artist Anish Kapoor—ultra-modern yet approachable and enduring. Once finished, it will be a shimmering, stainless steel jewel in downtown's crown. It will fit in easily among its neighbors with no trace of pretentiousness.

Massachusetts-based lead architect Moshe Safdie created a space that he says will remain "transparent, open and inviting," paying homage to the structure's end use by treating the gabled building and its halls like instruments. This consideration lends the space what he calls "a musical feeling."

Inside the building, the 1,600-seat Helzberg Concert Hall will house the Kansas City Symphony and a \$2.5 million, custom-built Casavant organ from Canada that boasts 5,633 pipes, 79 stops and 102 ranks. The Muriel Kauffman Theatre's 1,800 seats, meanwhile, will welcome patrons of the Lyric Opera and the Kansas City Ballet, while also playing host to musical performances, plays and lectures from world-renowned troupes, performers and individuals. Both halls were tested with an intensive beep analysis used in the acoustic world to find and resolve any dead zones and ensure superior sound clarity.

But the technology inherent to the Performing Arts Center goes far beyond its main use; there are eco-friendly features, as well. Radiant heating and cooling will use less energy, and most of the iron in the glass wall has been removed to keep the building cool and prevent glare.

On a more practical level, that glass wall takes advantage of a nearly unobstructed vista of the Crossroads Arts District and Liberty Memorial; the 17,000-square-foot, south-facing lobby creates what Safdie has dubbed a "front porch." This space will dominate the building's grand atrium, a superstructure that also envelops the two audience chambers. A park-like roof will top off the masterpiece, affording an even more unprecedented view of the city. "The views are extraordinary," Safdie says.

With a predicted total cost of more than \$400 million, the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts was made possible thanks to a \$40 million endowment and a generous \$105 million gift from Julia Irene Kauffman. The Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation purchased the land in 1999 from the family of one-time presidential candidate Ross Perot, who had envisioned a major financial center on the spot. What has risen instead is a gift to the city in more ways than one, according to Jan Schall, the Sanders Sosland curator of modern and contemporary art at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. "The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts will be a sensational addition to the architectural landscape of Kansas City," she says.

The center is also the capstone that fulfills Kansas City's cultural destiny and cements its reputation as a true city of the arts. "Fall 2011 can't come soon enough," Schall says, "but great things are always worth waiting for." ■

## CULTURE THE ARTS' NEW HOME

STORY BY BLAIR SCHULMAN

### TAKING OWNERSHIP

The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts is looking to raise an additional \$20 million with its "seat naming campaign." The facility will affix a metal plaque inscribed with a name to the back of seats in each hall. Donations range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 per seat.

Another donor project is the Children's Wall, which will honor, as the Center states, any "youngster who deserves some special recognition." For \$1,000 per handprint made on the wall, donors have an exciting way to engage the city's youth, who are, after all, the future audience and performers at the Kauffman Center.

For more information or to make a donation online, visit [kauffmancenter.org](http://kauffmancenter.org).



**RESOURCE GUIDE:** *Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts*, [kauffmancenter.org](http://kauffmancenter.org). *Moshe Safdie and Associates*, 100 Properzi Way, Somerville, Massachusetts, 617-629-2100. *Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation*, [murielmcbrienkauffmanfoundation.org](http://murielmcbrienkauffmanfoundation.org). *Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, 4525 Oak St., 816-751-1278.

Set to open for the 2011 season, the Moshe Safdie-designed Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts is already rising; at right is a rendering of what it will look like when finished.